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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
7 March 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Recent Communist Uses of Cambodian Territory

Summary

The Communists continue to use Cambodian territory for tactical sanctuary, for base areas, for the infiltration of personnel, and as a source of rice, medicines, and sundry supplies. Communist base areas on the eastern border of Cambodia have continued to expand as the tempo of the war in South Vietnam has increased. We do not believe, however, that the step-up in military activity since the Tet offensive has taxed the capability of the established supply route from North Vietnam via Laos and the trail system along the Cambodian border.

There is a growing body of circumstantial evidence, however, that the Communists may have stepped up the acquisition of supplies through southern Cambodia. The appearance of new weaponry in the IV Corps area, along with the heavy expenditure of ammunition in the III and IV Corps areas, point to an increasing likelihood that Cambodia may be used to at least augment the military equipment which is reaching this area over more established routes from North Vietnam via Laos and the trails into South Vietnam.

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### Introduction

The Vietnamese Communists continue to use Cambodian territory for tactical sanctuary, for base areas, for infiltration of personnel, and as a source of supply. With the step-up in Communist military activity since the Tet offensive, especially the increase in enemy ammunition expenditures, there has been increasing concern that Cambodia is playing a more direct role as a logistic base for the Communists. There have been reports of Chinese ships unloading arms at Sihanoukville for the Vietnamese Communists, of large convoys of trucks transiting the Cambodian border with arms and ammunition, and of enemy tanks in action in Ray Ninh Province close to the Cambodian border. This memorandum reviews current knowledge of: (1) VC/NVA access to Cambodia from southern Laos, (2) developments along Cambodia's eastern frontier, and (3) the possibilities of sea-borne deliveries of arms to VC/NVA forces via Cambodia.

### Recent Trends

The level of VC/NVA ammunition expenditures in South Vietnam has grown appreciably since the Tet offensive. However, the largest increase has occurred in areas that are independent of logistic support from Cambodia. Specifically, the artillery, rocket, and mortar ammunition firings in the I Corps areas and the DMZ by VC/NVA forces have shown the largest increases. These are the same areas where the heaviest Communist expenditures were made in 1967. Munitions for Communist forces in these areas were supplied from North Vietnam by shipment through Laos and across the DMZ.

Communist mortar and rocket fire have also been stepped up in the III and IV Corps areas. We do not believe that their recent ammunition expenditures have been sufficient to deplete stockpiles or place an impossible burden on the Communist logistical system, although individual Communist combat units may have experienced temporary shortages of ammunition from time to time. Numerous PW's have reported that large quantities of arms and ammunition were obtained from stockpiles already within South Vietnam, however.

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It is clear that prior to the Tet offensive, the Communists had completed a large logistic build-up. This build-up enabled them to equip recruits and guerrillas with new weapons and adequate supplies of ammunition. Given the substantial unutilized capacity of land routes from North Vietnam through Laos, we do not believe that the Communist offensive in South Vietnam was of such a magnitude as to have required the establishment of a new logistic pipeline dependent on Chinese material imported through Cambodian ports. It is possible that the build-up in the III and IV Corps areas was augmented by an input of materiel moved via Cambodia, although we have no hard evidence that this was the case.

A number of low-level reports of the deployment of VC/NVA armored vehicles into eastern Cambodia and adjoining areas of South Vietnam have not been substantiated. Although the North Vietnamese could move armor over Laotian roads to the tri-border area, its deployment further south would be hampered by the lack of secure roads, long distances, and maintenance problems.

Since the armored vehicles that were employed against a US force in Tay Ninh Province late in February 1968 have not been identified, it is particularly difficult to judge how they arrived there. It is possible that the tanks were rehabilitated US vehicles that had been lost in earlier operations. The repair of a few US vehicles could have been carried out by cannibalizing a number of tanks, even perhaps by a unit of the Cambodian army without the knowledge of the central government. The Cambodian army inventory includes 12 US M-24 tanks, 60 US armored cars, and 46 US halftracks. The Cambodians also have 17 French AMX-13 tanks, 6 Soviet BTR-40 armored personnel carriers, and 4 Soviet tracked prime movers, but there is no evidence that they have turned over any of their armored vehicles to the VC/NVA forces.

#### The Northern Access to Cambodia from Laos

We do not believe that the Communists are freely using Cambodia's internal road and waterway nets for the shipment of arms and ammunition from Laos.

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Comprehensive aerial reconnaissance of the northern border area reveals no connecting road from Laotian Route 119 (see the map) to the Cambodian road system, other than the abandoned segment of Cambodian Route 97. Since early 1966, Sihanouk has allowed this segment to deteriorate to prevent its use by the Communists. The photographic evidence is buttressed by ground observer reports that indicate an average daily traffic flow along Route 119 of no more than two vehicles per day. Although there is a substantial volume of small watercraft on the Se Kong - Tonle Kong waterway, ground observers report that cargo is being moved almost exclusively upstream, from Cambodia into Laos. These shipments consist principally of rice, other foodstuffs, and gasoline destined for NVA forces in southern Laos and adjoining areas of South Vietnam. [REDACTED] recently have reported small shipments of arms moving upstream, but these could have been destined for a small Cambodian outpost known to be on the border.

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#### The Eastern Border of Cambodia

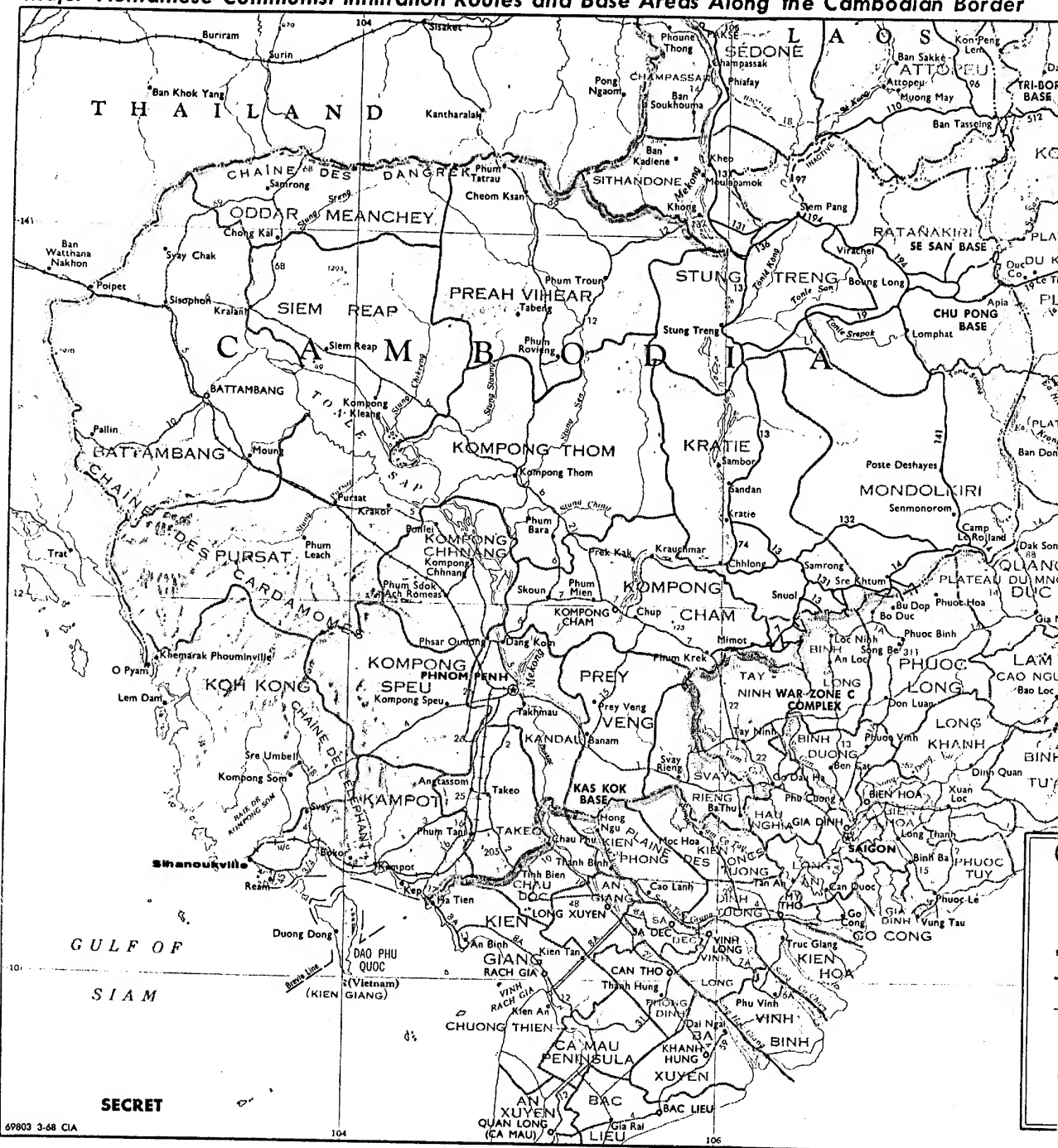
Vietnamese Communist forces are continuing to develop infiltration routes and bases along Cambodia's eastern border. Although the base in the tri-border region of Cambodia was established several years ago, it has been further developed in recent months. Tribal groups have been forced out of this area, a road has been extended through the extreme salient into South Vietnam, and new facilities for storage, training, shelter, and defense have been built. A well-developed trail system is used to move men and supplies southward from the tri-border base into the Sa Son and Chu Pong base areas.

Food, medicines, and other supplies of Cambodian origin reach these bases via secondary roads and trails (west-east) from Route 19, and by water via the Tonle San. Continuing improvements being made by Cambodian civil and military authorities on the roads between Virachai and the South Vietnamese border to facilitate the delivery of supplies to state plantations and Cambodian military outposts will also facilitate deliveries to the Vietnamese base areas.

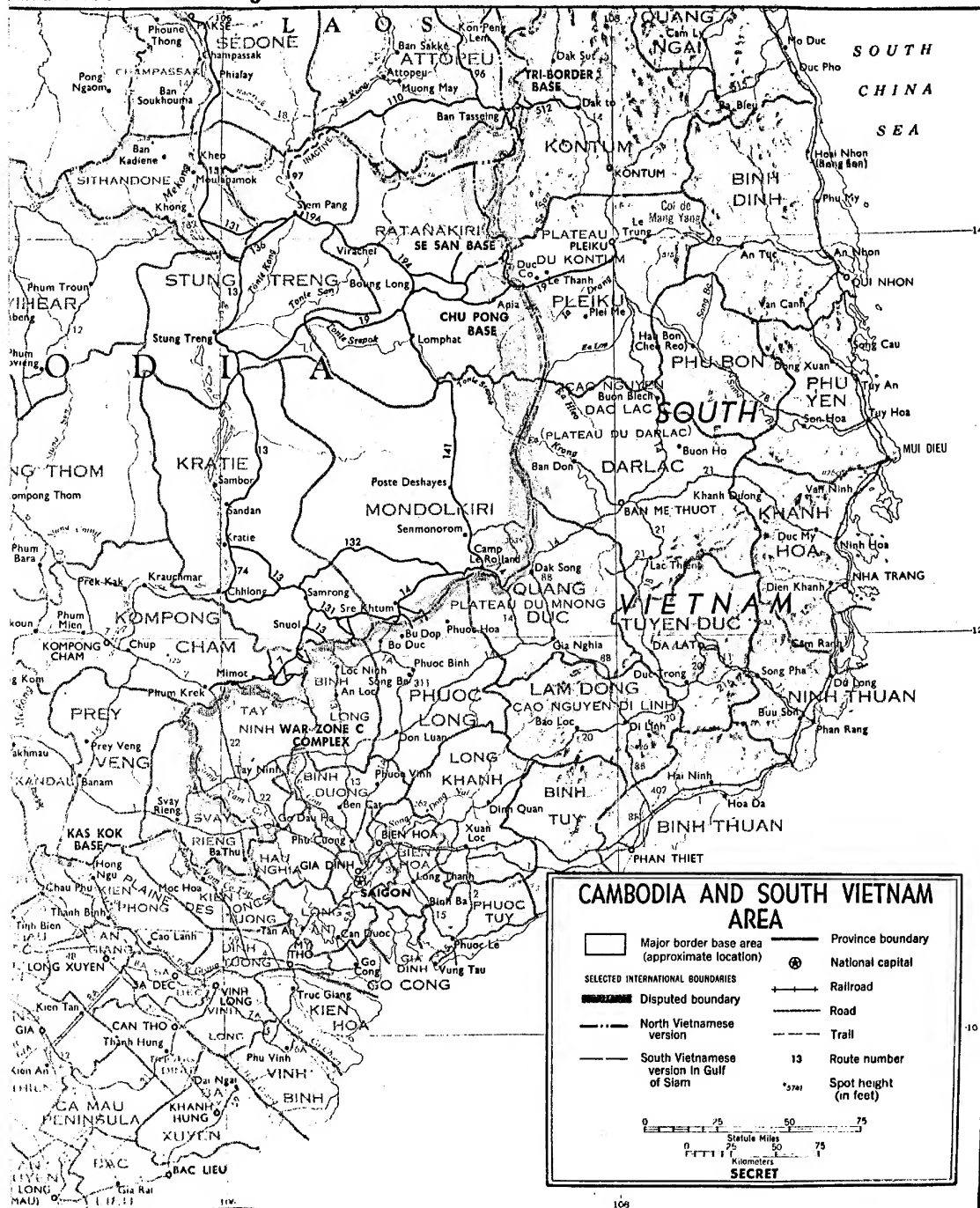
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## Major Vietnamese Communist Infiltration Routes and Base Areas Along the Cambodian Border



## and Base Areas Along the Cambodian Border





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Further south, Cambodia's roads in the border regions of Mondulkiri, Kratie, Rongpong Cham, and Svay Rieng Provinces are used to transport Cambodian supplies to VC/NVA military units. Determination of the volume of these shipments is complicated by the location of Cambodian military camps and civilian population in these areas. This inability to distinguish Communist traffic from all other traffic is particularly difficult on the heavily traveled Route 7 in the Snoul area. Nearly all trucks moving from Phnom Penh and the south regions to the four northeastern provinces must travel on Route 7 through Snoul. It is in this area that most of the traffic said to be bound for the VC/NVA forces is reportedly seen.

We continue to believe that most of the VC-destined supplies moved over Cambodian roads consist of rice, other foodstuffs, and such support materials as batteries and medicines. The volume of Cambodian shipments to VC/NVA forces via the eastern border may be on the order of 35 short tons a day, and both civilian and military trucks are used to transport them.

There are recurrent reports of arms transfers, however, and it is probable that some Cambodian military commanders supplement their incomes through illegal sales of Cambodian equipment, much of which is similar to that used by VC/NVA forces, to the Vietnamese Communists. In the absence of central government approval, however, equipment accountability controls would probably limit the volume of such sales.

there has been a systematic and possibly sustained movement of military supplies from Cambodia. The quantities involved are not yet known, and it is not clear whether these supplies came from Cambodian stocks or were brought in clandestinely. We have no evidence to confirm the reports of large convoys of trucks moving military supplies to VC/NVA forces along the border of South Vietnam. Often such reports contain contradictions, or do not agree with other known information on the road system or traffic movements.

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Seaborne Deliveries

Seaborne deliveries of military cargo to Cambodia are infrequent. The last identified major delivery of military cargo was a 450-ton consignment, believed to consist mainly of small arms and ammunition, on a Communist Chinese ship in March 1967. There are indications that some military equipment may also have been included among unidentified cargoes delivered by two Communist Chinese ships in August 1967 and January 1968. The appearance of 120-mm and 140-mm rockets in the III and IV Corps areas has led to the suspicion that sea infiltration is actually an important source.

The nature and volume of known Cambodian arms purchases and deliveries appear to have been consistent with Cambodian requirements. Since 1963, Communist countries -- principally Communist China and the Soviet Union -- have provided armaments valued at nearly \$15 million. These included 14 MIG-17's, 30,000 small arms, 800 mortars, as well as vehicles, anti-aircraft guns, artillery, and light aircraft.

South Vietnamese controls on shipping transiting the Mekong to Phnom Penh make it unlikely that significant amounts of arms or ammunition are being smuggled to the Communists via that route. These controls include cargo inspections and the surveillance of ships in transit. Communist-flag ships, ships chartered to Communist countries, and shipments from Communist countries are prohibited.

25X1X [redacted] arms deliveries to Sihanoukville are taken directly from shipboard to Cambodian military bases or units. Without government collusion, any continuing effort to smuggle arms through Cambodian ports to Communist forces probably would be detected.

It is conceivable that Sihanouk has permitted the shipment of small quantities of some types of military supplies to VC/NVA forces via Cambodian

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military channels. Sihanouk may have concluded that small, easily disguised shipments would entail little risk and would serve as insurance in any future confrontation with the Communists. The same motive may have prompted his public approval of normal trade relations with the Communists.

On the other hand, Sihanouk has been persistent in striving to maintain his country's neutrality and has loudly professed his opposition to any foreign encroachment upon Cambodian territory. He has also made a sharp distinction between military and non-military aid to the Viet Cong, arguing that the former would not be consistent with Cambodia's position as a neutral. It seems more likely that if the Communists are moving military hardware into Cambodia via the sea they would do so in much the same way they redistribute supplies along the coast of South Vietnam. We believe that it would be relatively easy for the Communists to make clandestine deliveries by small craft over the beach along the virtually unpatrolled Cambodian coast for subsequent overland movement into South Vietnam. We have no reliable reports, however, that this has been occurring.

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S-2656

Executive Registry

68-1135/1

Dear Bus,

We have had a look at Communist uses of Cambodia in relation to the war in South Vietnam as you requested last week. We have found an increasing number of reports on the infiltration of weapons through southern Cambodia, but we still cannot confirm that the volume of this traffic is significant.

/s/ Richard Helms

Richard Helms  
Director

7 March 1968

(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101  
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

CD/OSR Distribution: (S-2656)

- 2 - CD/OSR (1 w/encl)
- 1 - CS/IRA (w/encl)
- 1 - CS/D/I (w/encl)
- 1 - I/TIC (w/encl)
- ① - St/P/C (w/encl)
- 1 - St/CS (w/encl)
- 1 - I/L (w/encl)
- 1 - ACB/D/IS, IS/IT (w/encl)
- 1 - IS/CST (w/encl)

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